

# MAINTAINING A FIRE SAFE SCHOOL DURING A PANDEMIC

The Colorado Springs Fire Department wants to ensure that schools maintain vigilance against all known threats such as fires, school violence, or a public health crisis and not back down from the strides we have taken to prevent or reduce risk. When there is a public health crisis such as a pandemic, additional modifications to school operations are necessary; however, the fire code still must be adhered to. Here are the areas that have a higher likelihood of fire code violations:

1. **Fire Drills:** Fire and evacuation drills are a vital component in preparing our students, teachers, and staff for potential emergencies. Drills can still be safely conducted regardless of pandemic related restrictions. Top reminders for fire drills:
  - The school year's first drill must be done within ten days of the beginning of classes to ensure that all students, teachers, and staff are familiar with the updated procedures. If the school is operating in class cohort rotations, all cohorts must conduct a drill within this timeframe.
  - Each school must conduct at least one physical evacuation drill each month of all class cohorts. This may require doing the monthly drill on multiple days to ensure all occupants participate.
  - Modifications to support pandemic related restrictions may include:
    - All participants wear a mask.
    - Place the staff along the evacuation routes to limit congestion.
    - Expand rally points to accommodate proper distancing.
    - Phase the re-entry to the building to minimize congestion.
    - Direct all participants to wash/sanitize hands before returning to rooms.
2. **Propped Open Doors:** Fire doors serve an important purpose in the event of a fire and can help to contain heat and smoke. Leaving fire doors wedged open to reduce the high-touch frequency, increased ventilation, and promote easy access to exit points from a building is **prohibited**. Doors may only be held open by an approved automatic closing device and should be kept closed at all other times.
3. **Storage of Furniture & Equipment:** Excess furniture and equipment needs to be stored appropriately and may not create any obstructions. Top reminders for storage:
  - Corridors/hallways and exits doors must be kept clear and unobstructed at all times.
  - It is unacceptable at any time to have boxes, chairs, desks, recycle bins, or unattended deliveries blocking exit routes.
  - Desks and tables used in corridors as auxiliary teaching areas must not obstruct exit pathways.
  - There needs to be a three-foot clearance around all fire protection equipment such as manual pull stations, fire extinguishers, and fire sprinkler risers.
  - Access to electrical panels shall be kept free and clear with at least a three-foot clearance.
  - Combustible material shall not be stored in the boiler, mechanical, or electrical rooms.

# MAINTAINING A FIRE SAFE SCHOOL DURING A PANDEMIC

4. **Physical Environment Modifications:** If a public health crisis drives the need to modify the physical learning environment in school buildings, the fire code must be adhered to. Top reminders for physical environment modifications:
- Whenever a space, room, or area is repurposed or separations are constructed, even if these changes are only meant to be temporary, the school must apply for a building permit and potentially an applicable fire code permit to ensure that life safety in the built environment is being met.
  - If the construction of new walls or barriers is installed, fire protection systems, such as fire alarms and/or fire sprinklers may need to be modified to ensure adequate coverage.
  - Exiting the building in the event of an emergency through means of egress remains accessible and not blocked by any barrier.
  - Hanging or installing temporary barriers must not interfere with the fire alarm notification devices or fire sprinkler functions.
  - Temporary barriers must be non-combustible.
5. **Improper Use of Extension Cords:** With the increased demand for utilizing equipment that requires charging, streaming, and displaying, it will put a strain on the limited electrical outlets in a defined learning area. Top reminders for extension cords:
- Extension cords may only be used temporarily and must not be installed for permanent use.
  - Extension cords must not be connected to each other and should never be attached to permanent fixtures or pass-through holes in walls.
  - Extension cords must never be placed under rugs or taped in place for extended use.
  - Power strips with surge protectors are acceptable when plugged directly into an outlet.
  - Never overload an outlet or surge protector.

**For More Information:**

Colorado Springs Fire Department  
719-385-5950  
[coloradosprings.gov/schoollink](https://coloradosprings.gov/schoollink)